



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

PESSIMISM IN TEGNÉR'S POETRY

In a previous article ("Försoningen in Tegnér's Frithiofssaga," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. X), the writer traced Tegnér's religious views as expressed in his poetry. The following article is written with a view towards supplementing the former by tracing in Tegnér's poetry his pessimistic attitude towards life.

Tegnér's religion and poetry were always closely identified; to study his art is to study his religion as well. His poetic activity was a varied and extensive one, manifesting itself now in Old Norse themes after the Gothic style, now in shorter lyric poems and now in didactic or philosophical poems on formal occasions. Living in an age when the Romantic view of life laid emphasis upon its sadder phases, when the spirit of *Werther*, of *Novalis* and *Tieck*, of *Byron* and *Young* was still deep-seated in the hearts of men, it is not at all surprising to find that Tegnér too imbibed much of this spirit. Yet, on the whole, his poetry was not pervaded with a spirit of gloom. Altho his native tendency to hypochondria and his sympathy with the proverbial "Weltschmerz" of the day played an important part in the spirit of his poetry, they have, nevertheless, been unduly emphasized. It is, of course, true that Tegnér often did express this phase of his temperament, but his poetry shows, nevertheless, a surprisingly strong element of optimism and of healthy joy in life; and above all it reveals a faith that was never shaken in God's wisdom and love and in the ultimate triumph of the spirit. In fact, if one reads Tegnér in his entirety, so buoyant in his faith, so firm in his devotion to the highest and best in life, one is inclined to feel that he bears, on the whole, the spiritual stamp of a *Tennyson* or *Browning* rather than the mark of the cynical *Byron*, whose influence upon him he himself acknowledged. Like all human beings, Tegnér was a creature of moods, but while the darker moments of despair often colored the expression of his emotions, as a whole, his poetry reveals a spirit unbroken by misfortune and still retaining a sweet-souled attitude towards life. Tho by temperament very serious and prone to hypochondria, he was sustained by a grand religion, which raised him far above that pessimism which makes life a tragedy and the universe a chaos in which the eternal verities become a mockery. He saw life as it was and accepted it as such, yet behind all was the great

spirit of good that pervades the universe. Tegnér can, therefore, hardly be termed a pessimist in the essence of his religion or in his philosophy of life, yet his poetry was often colored by morose brooding and the realization of bitter realities. In this he typified the Swedish genius, and it is just this element of his poetry which deserves particular attention, not only as an expression of Tegnér's individual art, but also as the expression of that which was and is best in the Swedish nation.

First of all, we must realize that Tegnér suffered continually with a physical ailment (probably, to a large degree, inherited), which naturally darkened his thoughts. Tho finally crowned with success in his life's work and hailed as Sweden's national poet, his life, nevertheless, was very unhappy; for the inner harmony upon which the happiness of every individual rests, was completely destroyed by his unfortunate position as Bishop of the Lutheran Church, in which he realized that he had forfeited his life's work and sacrificed his genius at the altar of duty. These are extenuating circumstances which explain to a very large degree the individual tone of bitterness, despair and contempt which especially after 1824 found expression in his poetry. But there was in Tegnér's temperament something that was very national over and above the personal conditions or vicissitudes of his life, namely that fundamental seriousness of character which viewed life as a stern reality. In his critical views regarding the composition of his *Frithiofssaga* (*Anmärkingar såsom inledning till Frithiofssaga*, 1839) Tegnér recognized this as a national characteristic, that the fundamental tone of the Swedish national folk-song was elegiac, but that this natural propensity upon the part of the Swedish people was not contradictory to their robust and healthy temperament, in fact it was just this seriousness which gave the national genius its peculiar temper and character.¹ In the elegy to his brother, *Elof Tegnér* (1815), whom he idealized in his love, he

¹ "Det går som en elegisk grundton genom alla våra gamla nationalmelodier, och i allmänhet genom allt det betydningfullare i våra häfder; ty det ligger på bottnen af nationens hjerta. Jag har någonstädes sagt om Bellman, vår mest nationella skald:

Och märk det vemodsdraget öfver pannan
ett nordiskt sångardrag,
en sorg i rosenrödt!

ty detta vemod står icke i strid med det lefnadsglada och friska i national lymnet; det ger endast mera intensitet och spänstighet."

pictured Elof just as he later did Bellman, with the national stamp of seriousness upon his brow, yet withal smiling and hopeful—

Hur stod du icke, mig en föresyn,
med tankens allvar . . . , som kan le jemväl.

It is this element of seriousness which Tegnér infused into his *Frithiofssaga*, especially into the character of *Ingeborg*, making her a worthy idealization of the Swedish woman, whose faithfulness and courage, united with a deep-seated love, gave literary expression to the peculiar stamp of the Swedish character.

Life is a constant struggle between good and evil, a curious mixture of contradictory elements of which joy and sorrow are the expression. At times, it seems as if Tegnér were overwhelmed by the darker aspects of life, as, for instance, when he wrote the little verse—*Sorg och glädje*—about sorrow and joy, in which, after the manner of the pessimist Schopenhauer, he felt sorrow to be a reality, but joy a delusion—

Glädje och sorg beherska alltjämt menskliga hjertat,
menniskotanken dernäst styres af sanning och lögn,
att ej skilja dem åt lät himlen sorgen bli sanning,
glädjen bli skimrande lögn, detta är lifvets mystèr.

But near the end of his life (1840) when he bade farewell to his lyre (*Afsked till min lyra*), he felt that joy was after all as much a reality as sorrow and that the great things of life, such as art and religion, really did give a permanent, everlasting joy that was no delusion—

Jag vet ej rätt, såsom min lefnad skridit,
om mer jag fröjdats eller mer jag lidit.

This was quite characteristic of Tegnér, for the poet's final judgment was generally optimistic, "med tankens allvar . . . , som kan le jemväl." His poetry is just this mixture of sorrow and joy, in which the national temper of seriousness is ever present, but in which a courage and hopefulness persist in spite of the elegiac undertone.

Tegnér was a sensitive spirit, within whom there was a well-defined sense of right and wrong, of justice and oppression. It was rather in the *ethical* than in the *spiritual* world that his soul could not find adjustment; his principal grievance was, therefore, directed against *man* rather than against *God*. Nourished on the larger humanism of Schiller and strengthened by the noble character of Kant's ethics, Tegnér felt the age in which he lived to be weak, narrow and destitute of high character. His sympathy for

Gothic ideals, his attacks upon the spirit of the Swedish people (cf. *Svea*, 1811), his pessimistic attitude towards European politics (cf. *Nyåret*, 1816), all showed him to be painfully conscious of the short-comings of his own nation, as well as of the fact that "the whole world was out of joint." Even as early as 1799, while a student at Lund, he writes—

Vårt hopp följde seklets framrullande flod,
att uti dess sköte se frukterna burna
utaf deras mödor—men mörker och blod
från botten flöt utaf dess urna.

Not only abroad but at home the spirit of man was pusillanimous and weak, as he writes soon afterwards (1804) in *Vid en borgarflickas graf*—

Forndygd, med dess allvar, är begravnen,
tidens ande är så svag, så trång:
döf är menniskan, och döf är grafven;—
tystna, skaldmö, med din enkla sång!

Tegnér was at this time so deeply affected by human weakness and injustice that he acknowledged his loss of faith in humanity, for in 1817 in a poem to *L. P. Munthe*, he thanked the latter for having restored to him this faith and given him back his hope again—

tack ännu i evigheten
för hvar ren och skön gestalt,
jag trott se i dödligheten,
för min tro på menskligheten,
för mitt hopp, för allt, för allt.

That Tegnér felt the State to be to blame for the unfortunate situation in which he found himself in 1824 is evident from his letters.² The tragedy of his life, therefore, goes back finally to the social organization, towards which he often expressed a strong personal grievance.

In connection with Tegnér's pessimistic views concerning man there may have been, besides this lack of adjustment to his office

² Gustaf III gaf sina skalder kanske en falsk riktning, men der jämte gaf han dem en oberoende existens och en ärofull möjlighet att lefva för sin konst. Nu ger man oss stjärnor och band och statens högsta och ansvarsfulla ämbeten. En man af ära vårdslösar ej den tjenst han mottagit, och med poesien får det gå som det kan, hon får åtnöja sig med hvad som blir öfver af tid och förmåga. Sverige er kanske mer än man föreställar sig utomlands de stora anlagens land både för vetenskap och konst, *men vi komma sällan till någon mögnad; vår genius blir frostbiten liksom våra skördar.*"

as Bishop and its grievous consequences upon his art, something personal which he never completely divulged. In a letter to *Brinkman* (1825) the year after the acceptance of this office, he hinted to the latter concerning a broken friendship or possibly love, which added bitterness to his life. "If one is forced," he writes, "to despise a character whom one has loved, then one experiences the most bitter thing life has to offer." He left no clue as to what this relation might have been, but it is evident that still another personal sorrow was now added to his cup. Critics have been wont to ascribe the theme of renunciation in love (*försakelse i kärleken*), which appears so strongly in *Frithiofssaga* and in *Axel* and which was to have appeared in *Gerda*, to such a personal experience, but this motif is the essence of Christian love and as such would naturally have appealed to Tegnér, whose poetry was, for the most part, only the expression of his religion.

In such a frame of mind it is no wonder that Tegnér's views of life lacked equipoise and judgment during the next few years after 1824. Many of his political views and especially his contradictory attitude in political life may rightly be attributed to this dejected frame of mind. In 1825 appeared his celebrated poem, *Mjeltsjukan*, which expressed the lowest point to which the pendulum of Tegnér's spirit had swung. His soul had become shrouded in the darkness of despair, but even here we can see that altho he had lost his confidence in man he still retained his faith in God.

Tegnér's pessimism, being mainly directed towards man as an individual in the social and political organization, is most conspicuous in the poems directed against the spirit of his age (cf. especially *Nyåret*), whereas the brighter hope of his religion generally modified the expression of this attitude whenever the poet was concerned with a purely philosophical or religious theme.

Tegnér's love of nature and life often found expression in his poetry. He sang to the stars, the sun, the trees (cf. *Stjernasången*, 1812; *Träden*, 1813; *Sång till solen*, 1817) and in the spirit of the true Romanticist he found the immanent God in all His works. His pantheism was a part of his joyous doctrine of life, in which he found a brotherhood in all created things (cf. especially *Träden*, and *Försoningen* in the *Frithiofssaga*). Indeed, the prevailing sentiment of lament in contemporaneous literature he felt to be out of tune with the true spirit of poetry. After the fashion of Goethe's inspiring *Zueignung* (1784) Tegnér in his *Sången* (1819) heralds the

Genius of Poetry as a joyous Spirit who cannot tolerate grief nor gloom—

ty skaldens sorger äro inga
och sångens himmel evigt klar.

Poetry is a balsam for the heart's grief—

Mot hvarje qval, hans hjerta sårar—
dess helsodryck en läkdom fått.

which directly reflects Goethe's own words which the latter in his *Zueignung* puts into the mouth of the Genius of Poetry—

“Erkennst du mich, die in manche Wunde
Des Lebens dir den reinsten Balsam goss?”

And in his *Epilog* of 1820, Tegnér expresses in the following beautiful lines the divine nature of poetry—

Men på dess gator vandra upp och ner
ovanskliga, olympiska gestalter,
af strålar väfda och af rosendoft;

of which the last line is a literal translation of Goethe's own words—

Aus Morgenduft gewoben und Sonnenklarheit.

In fact, in his *Epilog* of 1829 Tegnér awarded to Goethe the poet's throne (*ty tronen är Göthes*) which even the favored *Oehlenschläger* was denied. Tho avowing³ his preference for Schiller and averring a lack of sympathy for the universality of Goethe's genius, it is evident, nevertheless, that Tegnér was impressed⁴ with the healthy, joy-giving spirit of Goethe's perfect poise of character. Tegnér's love of nature and his spiritual faith found something akin in Goethe's optimism which was, however, far less personal than that of the Swedish poet. But the vicissitudes of Tegnér's life,

³ “Goethe är den universellaste af alla poeter. Han sprider sig som ljuset åt alla möjliga håll. Men därför saknar han också hvad man kallar individualitet—han ger oss hela den bildade mensklighetens individualitet i stället för sin egen. Han är ett abstractum af poesi. Schiller lägger hela sitt rika väsen i hvarje äfven den obetydligaste dikt.”

⁴ To this Tegner gave expression later in his poem dedicated to *Franzén* as introductory to his *Kronbruden* (1841),

Dock—djup är *Faust*, och hur *Tasso* glöder!
hur varm *Ottilia*, innerlig *Mignon*!
Förstånd från Norden, känslor ifrån Söder
försmälta skönt uti hans gudasång.
Hvar hjertat älskar, hjertat gläds och blöder,
der har den väldige sin stilla gång.
I vetenskap, som konst vi ständigt möte
på spetsen af sin tid *den blott för lugne Goethe.*

as well as his natural tendency to hypochondria, threw him off his poise at times, so that the darker aspects of life found expression in his poetry in spite of the joyous spirit which he had in his *Sången* attributed to its Genius.

We shall now consider just what these aspects were. First of all, the contemplation of death and the grave forms a very large element in Tegnér's poetry. This is quite natural not only because the poet was a priest whose temperament was serious and contemplative but also because the prevailing literature of the Romantic School was permeated with this spirit.

Ossian, as Tegnér himself said, was *tidens modebok*, from which he early in life, thru Macpherson's translation, had drawn much inspiration. In fact, Tegnér gives direct evidence of his enthusiasm for Ossian in his poem *Till min hembygd* (1804) in which he pictures⁵ Ossian, the Genius of the poet's early years, standing in the wild winds upon the cliff and singing those divine songs "which have come down thru the ages with the gentleness of a dove and the roar of thunder." Consequently, the proverbial moon-light effect, the nightingale and the sighing winds are reflected very strongly in Tegnér's poetry, whenever the grave or death appears.

The influence of *Herder* and especially of *Rousseau* upon Tegnér was quite marked. When Tegnér made his first visit to Stockholm he said that in spite of the great advantages a large city had to offer, he had too much of Rousseau in his veins to feel himself at home. Tegnér loved the simplicity of nature and in it sought, like Rousseau, the solution of the life, social and religious. In his poems, *Kulturen* (1805) and *Fridsröster* (1808), he trusts the primitive instincts of man to lead us aright thru the maze of life, which no intellect can penetrate. The search for "the Original" (*det ursprungliga*), which Rousseau had instituted, was the prime impulse in the Romantic movement.

Young too, who in his philosophic contemplation of nature (*Night Thoughts*, 1743) asserted the dignity of man and the glorification of the Deity in nature, found expression again and again in Tegnér's elegies.

⁵ Så var den glömda bygd, som födde *Ossians* yra.
Med guden i sitt bröst, med vinden i sitt hår,
han stod på klippans spets och sjöng.—Försvunna år
som hamnar stego opp att dansa kring hans lyra:
fram genom sekler kom hans gudasång
med dufvans enfald och med dundrets gång.

The philosophy of *Kant* and the humanism of *Schiller* exerted a strong influence upon Tegnér, which is especially marked in his philosophical and religious poems, particularly those of a longer discursive or didactic character, in which the personal element is absorbed in the universal law. The Kantian philosophy and system of ethics, however, were impressed upon Tegnér chiefly thru their expression in Schiller's poetry. As early as 1804 Tegnér gave up the study of Kant in despair, on the ground that the abstractions⁶ of Kant's philosophy could not be comprehended by a mind so concrete as his own. Of other German poets besides Schiller who impressed themselves upon Tegnér's poetry in connection with the darker and more serious contemplation of life, *Bürger* also was important (a fuller discussion of whom will follow later in this article).

Byron, whose influence was deeply felt thruout the Romantic world, left a very strong impression upon Tegnér, in spite of the fact that the latter evidently struggled to throw off the sinister effect of the English poet's dark view of life. In fact, Byron seemed to be Tegnér's evil Genius, whose influence he sought to oppose but whose crushing, pessimistic views of life so nearly accorded with his own, when in a dejected mood, that in these darker moments he showed a very strong affinity with the English poet in thought, diction and style. Even as early as the year 1820, when discussing the merits of Byron's poetry, he unwittingly confessed his kinship to Byron. "Every one," he writes⁷ "has his dark hours, when he doubts God or man (which is the same thing); but doubt in itself is not to be despised. It is man's anchor in time of storm." He then praises the beauty of Byron's verse and his power of presentation. Two years later (1822) *Axel* appeared, which showed a marked resemblance to Byron's style and poetic diction. Yet in this same year Tegnér openly avowed that Byron seemed to him more and more gloomy and that in spite of all his genius the English poet was positively repulsive (*vidrig*) to him. It was characteristic of Tegnér that his ultimate faith was never broken but that at times he yielded to his native tendency to hypochondria.

⁶ "Med mitt konkreta sinne har jag föga tycke eller fallenhet för dessa abstrakta spekulationer."

⁷ "En hvar har sina mörka stunder, då man tviflar på Gud eller, som här vill säga det samma, på menskligheten; men tviflet i sig sjelft är icke förkastligt. Det är menniskans nödanakare."

It was at these moments that the dark Byron exerted his sinister influence upon him. Even in the year 1825, when *Mjeltsjukan* appeared, he referred contemptuously to an article in *Stockholmsposten*, in which there was hinted a certain affinity (*frändskap*) between his poetry and Byron's. Tegnér asserted that the only person in the world who could see such a resemblance was the author of the article himself. "What similarity," he writes, "can be detected between his *demonic* and my *humane* nature, between his *dark* and my *happy*, yea perhaps even *frivolous* philosophy of life, between his *blue, sulphuric flames* and my *sparkling* display of *fire-works*." There is a great deal of truth in this assertion of Tegnér; for the heart of his philosophy and religion was directly opposed to that of Byron. But in his attitude towards man Tegnér's pessimism caught up the Byronic strain in spite of himself and he found that when under the influence of this sentiment he was, after all, in many respects akin to Byron. Late in this same year, Dec. 1825, he confessed in a letter to *Martina von Schwerin* that he was beginning to have a better understanding and appreciation of Byron. "A certain contempt," he writes, "for the two-legged race of dogs, called *man*, seems to me now no longer so unpoetical." And in a song to Franzén he praised Byron as one of those who had infused their own soul into poetry. Furthermore, Tegnér's criticism of Byron, as a poet, is significant in that he felt Byron to be weak in inventing situations but strong in presentation and description—a criticism which can rightly be brought against Tegnér himself.

Byron's influence upon Tegnér, therefore, was very marked, but mainly to be seen whenever the latter was overwhelmed with a sense of despair and a lack of faith in man. It will be shown that this pessimism marked Tegnér only when in a dejected mood, that it was not a consistent philosophy of life on Tegnér's part, inasmuch as his cynical views, then expressed, were repeatedly refuted elsewhere in his poetry when his spirit had regained, or was in, its normal state of poise.

In his contemplation of life and death, Tegnér emphasized the Christian precept that mortal life is but mere vanity and that the only great comfort and permanent satisfaction for the human soul is the life beyond; therefore, life is but a preparation for a higher existence and every soul must so live in accordance with the eternal verities that he shall pass from this life to the next in one

continuing existence. This is the chief element of his elegies and bespeaks the religious poet, seeking to comfort the world in its sorrow. In 1810, he says in *Till en yngling*—

Bryt blomman, o yngling, i morgon skall den
på grafven strös.

Life is short and physical existence transitory.

Even in the *Frithiofssaga*, old King Ring could not find satisfaction in his earthly life and when death came he welcomed the deliverance. This is, of course, in accord with the Old Norse spirit that *Valhalla* opens to the vision of the warrior an idealized life as a reward for his physical valor, yet it is significant that Tegnér represented King Ring as never having found contentment in his earthly life, a Gothic version of the poet's Christian view of the vanity of life—

Kung Rings död.

Fåfängt bland vilda
blodiga drotter
sökte jag friden, hon flyktade hän.
Nu står den milda
ätthögens dotter
väntande på mig vid gudarnas knän.

In the canto *Försoningen* (written in 1822) the priest of Balder, Tegnér's own spokes-man, says:

Ack! allt det bästa ligger på hinsidan om
grafhögen, Gimle's gröna port, och *lågt är allt*,
besmittadt allt, som dväljes under stjernorna.

This is the very same sentiment concerning the vanity of earthly life which he previously expressed in the elegy to his brother *Elof Tegnér* in 1815—

Hvad har jag mer att söka här på jorden?
För lågt, för lågt hvar enda dödlig bygger,
som bygger *under stjernorna* ännu.

The same idea that the spirit life is the great reality in which we should live, Tegnér again expressed in the elegy to *K. L. Beckfriis* (1834)—

ty allt hvad lifvet stort och heligt har
från *andeeverlden* kommer till en hvar.

In 1804, Tegnér wrote two poems which are especially significant in this regard, namely *Den vise* and *Förvillelsen*. The former is much more optimistic than the latter, in that in the former

Tegnér emphasizes in a positive fashion the final triumph of the spirit, while in the latter, since he is conscious of the fact that knowledge and the intellect are powerless to penetrate the mystery of the universe, he leaves the question open to doubt; but this doubt, as we shall see, can hardly be termed pessimistic.

In the poem *Den vise*, Tegnér unites the ethical grandeur of *Kant* and *Schiller* with the spiritual faith of *St. Paul*. Man is the play-thing of natural forces, yet thru the spirit and its manifestation in *virtue* he is at the same time the conquering force of the universe. The spirit, therefore, finally triumphs over the flesh, because the spirit is eternal and a part of the Divine Nature.

Till hvad *motsats* är då menskan buren?

Är dess sjungna storhet icke hel?

Der—*Guds afbild, kronan i naturen,*

der—*en boll för lyckans gyckelspell!*

Kom och känn, att *stor* är *menniskan,*

stor igenom visheten och dygden.—

Himlens arfving, glömda dygd! din hamn

bjuder vördnad än ur grafvens famn.

Själén, höjd från grusets region,

ser sin vagga i *den Nögstes tron*.

Allt är rof utaf förgängligheten,

tomt står rummet, der naturen var;

menskan blott är än den samma kvar,

hennes tanke fyller evigheten.

Uti kaos' natt ej lif, ej ljud,

intet, intet, utom hon och Gud.

In the poem *Förvillelsen*, on the other hand, Tegnér emphasizes solely the fact that the human intellect cannot comprehend the essence of things and therefore fails to bring man any nearer to the real nature of God. "We see the chain⁸ of reason link by link, but when the chain is completed we know not to what it should be fastened", i.e., the Divine nature (which is the essence of things) cannot be apprehended by the finite mind.

Vi se den länk för länk—men hvar

är fästet, hvarvid kedjan hänger?

⁸ Cf. Young.—*Night Thoughts* I—*On Life and Immortality*—

"Distinguish'd link in being's endless chain."

Tho Tegnér here leaves this question unanswered, it nevertheless finds a most conclusive answer four years later (1808) in *Frids-röster*, in which he trusts the primitive religious instinct in man to lead the spirit to God. Religious faith is an instinct entirely apart from the intellect, and it is religion alone which is our final comforter; a faith which Tegnér himself held and to which he often gave poetic expression (cf. especially *Nattvardsbaren*, the canto *Försoningen* in the *Frithiofssaga*). In *Frids-röster*, for instance, he says—

Ack, hvad gör det hur vi kalla
denne far, som dock är vår?
Hvad tillfälligt är må falla,
det väsentliga består.
Månn' den vise med sin lära,
än så djup, så konstigt byggd,
kommer världens Gud mer nära,
än den vilde med sin dygd.

In *Förvillelsen* Tegnér expresses himself in a state of doubt, which is natural to all man-kind in view of the mystery of the universe, that doubt which he later (1820) characterized as "a thing not to be despised, man's anchor in time of storm" (cf. above with reference to Byron). Even when he asks the final question as to the efficacy of the intellect (i.e., truth) in solving this mystery, his words imply that it at least cannot be done outside the spirit realm, for he refers to the material world as being enveloped in darkness (the symbol of ignorance)—

Månn' det i stoftets mörker sker?

Altho Tegnér is here less optimistic than in his poem *Den Vise*, one cannot infer that his view of life in *Förvillelsen* is pessimistic, inasmuch as it is only a doubt, not a conviction, which he entertains. In this poem, life seems to him dark and sad, and so it inevitably must be for one who is confronted with this doubt as to his soul's destiny.

Mörkt är, hvart helst han ser sig om:
i natt han går, ur natt han kom,
och ingen dag i dödens länder.

But the poet's final question leaves one with the impression that if Tegnér doubted the efficacy of the intellect to lead man to God he did not, however, deny his faith in the spirit or in the religious instinct of man in this regard. In spite of Tegnér's spirit of doubt,

it is not without hope and is far different from the philosophy of a true pessimist, such as, for instance, that of *Nietsche* or *Lenau*, of whom the latter pictured life in almost the same poetic figures⁹ as did Tegnér in the lines just quoted.

We may believe that Tegnér in his poem *Förvillelsen* expressed the depression with which every truly religious spirit is afflicted in the struggle for faith and clarity, that this depression was a part merely of his spiritual development; for his poetry gives, on the whole, overwhelming evidence that he finally did attain to this clarity thru his absolute devotion to the spirit.

The deathless character of the spirit Tegnér emphasizes most strongly again in his *Skaldebref* (1815). Here aesthetic ideals are interpreted in terms of his religious faith. The world of beauty is a part of the world of the spirit and therefore partakes of the nature of the spirit; in fact, beauty is nothing but a certain manifestation of the spirit of the universe, hence the universality and immortality of art.

Kroppen förvittras till luft, men sinnet är evigt det samma.

Death, therefore, can only be a release of the spirit from its earthly bonds. The soul rejoices after its long imprisonment and rises aloft to join the Infinite Spirit of God, as in the elegy to *J. Beckfriis* (1822)—

och anden lade glad ifrån sig stoftets börda

och ur det låga grus flög, som en bön, till Gud.

Here we also see the same contempt for earthly existence which was previously noted, the feeling that earthly life is contaminated and that the only worthy things connected with it are of spiritual origin. This feeling was also shared very strongly by the English poet *Young* and possibly Young increased the ascetic propensity upon the part of Tegnér to hold earthly life in contempt in order to glorify the spirit. Thus Tegnér says in the elegy to *Sven Hylander* (1825):

Gläd dig, yngling, i din himmel! Ack, *all jordens glädje är*

Som en hektisk rodnad för minuten

öfver lifvets bleka kinder gjuten:

gläd dig bättre der!

⁹ "Oh, Menschenherz, was ist dein Glück?

Ein rätselhaft geborner,

Und kaum gegrüsst, verlornor,

Unwiederholter Augenblick."

Death is the great awakening, the dawn of real life, as he says in the elegy to *Jacob Faxé* (1827)—

Dock, när den nattliga syn, den kära, blir ute för alltid,
detta är tecknet för er; glädjens, *ty dager är när!*
and in the elegy to *C. G. af Leopold* (1829)—

Hvad bor i mörkret? — "*Du* skall bo deri
(en stämma sade), skenet dig bedrager,
i natten sitt och tänk! *när den är slut, blir dager.*"

So, too, Death releases the scales from our eyes that we may behold the glory of Heaven, as in this same elegy to *Leopold*—

Han (döden) rörde ögat på den blinde siarn,
och fjällen föllo på en gång derifrån.
Hur klart är nu, hur ljust i fadershuset!
Färväl, du ljusets vän, och fröjda dig i ljuset!

The joys of Heaven know no bounds; a picture of these Tegnér gives in his poem addressed to a sorrowing father (*Till en sörjande fader*, 1827)—

Der är honom godt att vara; i en evig morgonvind
lättare hans hjerta klappar, rosigare är hans kind.
En gång faller han med glädje åter till sin faders bröst.—
Ingen högre lära vet jag, känner ingen bättre tröst.

In Heaven too the secret of life shall be made known, as St. Paul said (1 Corinth. XIII, 11) "for now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face," an orthodox sentiment which Tegnér probably cherished, as he says in *Till friherrinnan Martina v. Schwerin* (1839)—

och gåtan, som vi fåfängt gissa här,
det tros att *ordet dertill finnes der.*

Tegnér's orthodoxy, as one should expect, is but faintly detected in his poetry. His avowed hostility to theology¹⁰ and his personal faith in the universal spirit and in the universal significance of religion as a sentiment which no theological dogma could embrace, marked the paradoxical position in which he found himself as Bishop of the Church of Sweden. Like all great thinkers placed in a similar position, he extricated himself in a way by infusing into the traditional theological dogmas the universal significance for which they stood. He was an open enemy of Paul's

¹⁰ "Teologien i sitt förhållande till religionen är en dödskafe stjälp öfver en lilja." "Jag vet icke någon större fiende till religionen än teologien."

theology,¹¹ he regarded the orthodox conception of the Trinity as an impossibility (*quadratura circuli*—a squared circle), the Divinity of Christ irrational, and the Vicarious Atonement he looked upon with horror as “a butcher’s idea which is heathen both in sight of God and reason.”¹² But no open attack upon these tenets of faith was ever launched by the poet; he simply evaded them by emphasizing in his poetry “the thing in itself for which the symbol stood” (cf. especially *Försoningen* in the *Frithiofssaga*, and *Nattvardsbarnen*). Occasionally he makes reference to an orthodox conception, but even here it may be doubted whether Tegnér shared the sentiment which he expressed. For instance, in the elegy to *Sara Maria Tegman* (1834) he speaks of the Holy Trinity,¹³ which blesses her grave by Its presence. Yet here it is her orthodox fidelity to which he refers, rather than to his own faith in the Trinity. This faith in the Trinity and in Christ was the inspiration of *her* life and the source of *her* purity and gentleness of character, hence the poet’s reference to the Trinity at her grave. Tegnér never denied in his poetry his own personal religion.

It is doubtful whether Tegnér believed in the orthodox conception of the Judgment Day. The sentiment which he expressed late in life (*Efter talets slut vid Vexjö gymnasii jubelfest*, 1843) would seem to refute such a supposition in that he here emphasized character rather than faith as the final standard of judgment to be pronounced upon man. In the *Nattvardsbarnen* he makes reference to the Dooms-day but here again it seems to be for the purpose of infusing into the traditional eschatology the universal law of *re-*

¹¹ “Pauli lära är grekisk sofistisk inympad på judisk råhet.”

¹² Letter to Geijer, 1821.

¹³ Hvilka syner uppå randen
af din graf, hvad ljud ifrån
menskofadern, Gudomsanden
och din käre *Gudason!*

Lifvets kärna, hvart vi blicke,
han för alla bilda vill;
ack, för mången fins han icke,—
tror man honom, är han till.

Tro är kärlek, tro är gerning,
hvar det ädla andas fritt,
väsendet—ej form och skärning—
i hvar lif så skönt som ditt.

conciliation and *love*, which shall finally triumph. The heroic grandeur of the Last Day (the *Ragnarøk* of Old Norse mythology) must have attracted Tegnér's poetic instinct. In Christian mythology there is connected with this belief the gruesome notion that the body sleeps in the grave until the trumpet sounds and all are gathered together before the Just Judge. In folk-lore this assumed extensive proportions and became not an unimportant element in Romantic poetry, especially in ballad-poetry. Bürger's *Lenore* became one of the most popular ballads in the North. The gruesome effect of the body rising out of the grave to meet its beloved, the crowing of the cock which announces the time when the spectre must return to its dismal abode, were in keeping with the sombre effects of the supernatural in which the Romantic mind took a special delight. Tegnér had read Bürger in his early years (1797) while browsing around in Myrhman's library at Råmen and was, therefore, well acquainted with his poetry. That Tegnér did not wholly escape the atmosphere of Bürger's poetry is evident from his elegies in which this theme of the dead rising from the grave, etc., recurs. Yet it cannot be inferred that this constituted any part of his religious faith, inasmuch as it was merely a thing of art, a poetical, not a religious expression. In the elegy to his brother *Elof Tegnér* (1815) he pictures the three brothers as ghosts haunting the grave, whispering in the moonlight at midnight, bloodless, tearless and cold, while the nightingale sings in the tree-tops. The cock crows and the gruesome spectres return to the grave. Ossian is very evident here, combined with the lurid effects of Bürger; a picture no artist could resist when filled with the spirit of this phase of Romanticism.

Så sitta de, förnöjda, hand i hand;
 på deras bleka anleten ibland
 en stråle faller utur nattens lykta.
 Men deras öga tål ej solens brand;
 när hanen gal, de under jorden flykta.

There can be no doubt but that Tegnér was extremely dejected by the death of his brother whom he deeply loved, and this may have transported him to that mood in which the gruesome and supernatural were peculiarly attractive, even tho he was always sustained by a strong faith in the spirit. In this same poem, he expresses a grief so poignant that it must have necessarily affected the equipoise of his mind. He cannot endure life any longer which seems to him only a house of sorrow—

ty länge kan man dock ej hålla ut
i detta *sorgehus*, som kallas lifvet.

But this was only the expression of that personal grief which overpowers nearly every human soul, until time has healed the wound and lent a better perspective. This great grief may have led the poet to that expression of the awfulness of death which he found in the popular ballad, but it constituted no part of his religious philosophy.

Much later in life (1834) in an elegy to *K. L. Beckfriis* he again pictures the dead sleeping in the grave, issuing forth at night as ghosts and waiting for their loved ones to join them in the grave. Here he also hints at the Judgment Day, when all sorrows shall be turned to joy—

till dess de komma ner, en efter annan,
med brustna ögon, med den bleka pannan,
och samlas alla, *der det är förbi*
med jordens sorger.

Again in 1839 (*Till friherrinnan Martina v. Schwerin*) he refers to the Judgment Day after the long sleep—

men en gång vaknar du med mornad själ,
god morgon då! Till dess sof väl, sof väl!

Yet it must be inferred that Tegnér did not share in this theological dogma, but that under the influence of grief he often gave expression to it in his poetic art. Nor do the gruesome aspects of this conception prove any religious pessimism on his part except as the expression of a personal or transient grief. His poetic temperament caught up the strains of Ossian or Bürger without fundamentally affecting his religious views. Thus he often refers to the grave as the place of reunion after death, even tho he really believed in a spirit life after death and most often expressed this faith in his poetry. Such a contradiction is due to Tegnér's poetic temperament, which found expression now in the physical, now in the spiritual aspect of life, like joy and sorrow which are life's essential elements. In the elegy to his brother he expresses the hope that they may both rest in the same grave, even tho, in the same poem, he says that all mortal things should be despised. Even in his love-songs this dismal strain may often be detected, for instance in *Den lycklige* (1805)—

min själs begär, mitt lif, min tröst,
begrafb, begraf mig vid ditt bröst!

*Ack, i den grafven vill jag hvila;
dit låt den lycklige få ila!*

just as he says to his beloved brother,
då hoppas jag
vi få *hvila* med hvarandra
uti samma graf en dag!

But more often the spiritual vision of the poet sees beyond the mortal dust and emphasizes the brighter hope of immortality. Death cannot really separate two souls who love each other. Thus for instance, in *Till en aflägsen älskarinna* (1804):

Hvad är det mer?
Der bortom grafvens rand
vår sol ju ler
öfver ett bättre land.
Välkommen efter mig, Anna!
Döden löser ej våra band.

Later in life Tegnér joyfully anticipated this spirit-union beyond the grave where many dear ones had gone before him! *Anna Beata Leijonhufvud* (1835)—

Dock samlas en gång, som vi gerne höre,
de många vänner der, som vandrat före,
och därför blicka vi med fromt begär
till himlen opp: *o, den som vore der!*

The spiritual element of Tegnér's religion is the most marked characteristic of his poetry. Even when he is in his most dejected mood, this element is still present. When the crisis of his life had been reached, Tegnér expressed his great disappointment in the celebrated poem *Mjeltjukan* (1825). This poem has rightly been held as the most intense expression of Tegnér's pessimism. Nature withers and decays as in the autumn, earth's green grows yellow as if the hand of death were laid upon it, the sun and the stars are darkened, when the *svartalf* of melancholia bites into the poet's heart. The poison spreads thru his veins, his heart is frozen, all courage and joy die within him. *Poetry*, which Tegnér really worshipped as the highest expression of life (cf. *Afsked till min lyra*), now becomes a hollow mockery, a mere jugglery of meaningless words. *Man* himself, whose divinity Tegnér repeatedly emphasized (cf. *Fridsröster*), now bears the mark of Cain upon his brow, a liar and contemptible deceiver. Yet in spite of all this, Tegnér has no grievance with *God*, for the poet comforts himself with the

thought that all this suffering is but a test of character, a training in life's school, in which the Father has placed him, and that he will perhaps some day be united with the Eternal Spirit when all is over—

och tidens hittebarn, här satt i skolen,
får kanske se sin fader—bortom solen.

Tegnér, therefore, even when in his most dejected and pessimistic mood, never lost faith in God's wisdom and love. The stoic courage and persistent hope with which the poet faced his calamities mark him as an optimist so far as his faith in the ultimate destiny of man is concerned. Thus Tegnér's spirituality triumphed over the limitations and disappointments of earthly life, which are, as he himself said, only the wise ordinance of Almighty God in order to purify and perfect man's character. As in his poem *Elden* (1812), the future life is but a purification of this life. The soul is then, like asbestos, made by the heavenly flames purer and more beautiful—

och gör honom, som du gör asbesten,
mera skön och ren!

In *Mjeltsjukan* Tegnér expresses a temporary state of melancholia which the tragedy of his life had caused. The cynical view with regard to poetry, for instance, is but an expression of the great disappointment which he suffered in these years. This temporary emotion did not remain a permanent conviction with him, for he not only refuted it by the fact that his poetic activity remained unabated so far as time allowed, but he also directly denied such a view in his poetry itself. Later (1840) in his poem, *Afsked till min lyra*, he looks back upon life in its true perspective; "I really lived only when I sang."

Similarly, the poet's views regarding man in *Mjeltsjukan* are out of all true perspective. Man and woman are here represented as the two great lies in life; the only true thing about them being the mark of Cain upon their brows. Such an abnormally severe judgment was not in keeping with Tegnér's natural benevolence and magnanimity, and, therefore, must necessarily be attributed to the temporary state of melancholia with which he was beset at this time. He often emphasized the divine nature of man (cf. *Försoningen* in the *Friðhiofssaga*, *Nattvardsbarnen*, *Fridsröster*, etc.). *Den himmelska lågan*, which in *Fridsröster* Tegnér admonishes man to guard carefully and preserve as the greatest thing in life, repre-

sents the normal view of the religious poet. But in *Mjeltsjukan* the poet, as he himself says, is poisoned. As the poison of melancholia spreads thru his veins his vision becomes distorted and he sees things as the *svartalf*, the black demon of nature, would have him see them. It is quite probable that Tegnér himself was conscious of his distorted and exaggerated view but yielded to the force of mental depression which seems to have almost completely overpowered him. Poetry is like a bath (as *Henrik Ibsen* said in a speech to *Studentersamfundet*, Christiania, 1874), which often serves to restore the equilibrium of the mind by washing away the poisonous or corroding thoughts.

In *Mjeltsjukan*, woman is placed in the same category as man, the fallen son of Cain. Their great delight is in deceiving each other; in fact, deception is the only theme in poetry worthy of them. Here Tegnér's censorious attitude towards woman reminds us very vividly of *Frithiof's* attitude towards *Ingeborg* when he believes her to be faithless—

“O qvinna, qvinna!” nu Frithiof sade.

“Den första tanke, som Loke hade,
det var en lögn, och han sände den
i *qvinnoskepnad* till jordens män.”

We may well believe that Tegnér infused much into his hero which was characteristic of himself. Frithiof, in a moment of despair, pronounces a most distorted and unjust judgment upon his faithful Ingeborg and in the intensity of his indignation straightway relegates the whole female sex into the category of the faithless. Yet he soon discovers his mistake and learns to value her true worth. Likewise Tegnér himself pronounces in *Mjeltsjukan* an equally distorted and unjust judgment regarding woman, which both previously and subsequently he often denied. This proves, of course, his lack of true equipoise at this time; his calamities were too great for him to see and judge clearly. As a matter of fact, he had the highest regard for woman, the best proof of which is the character of Ingeborg herself, who, as the poet himself says, was to represent his ideal of the Swedish woman. As early as 1808 (*Till damerna*) he gives an idealized picture of woman, whose softer virtues are a necessary complement to man's sterner nature. Here there is no discord but absolute harmony between man and woman. Later in 1835 (*Anna Beata Leijonhufvud*) Tegnér represents human life as actually worthless without woman. Woman is possessed

of the highest virtues, great in her service and in her patience in all things—

O qvinnans värde, tyst och blygt och stilla,
högt i det stora, älskvärdt i det lilla!

Ack, qvinnan, qvinnan blef det högsta gifvet;
hvad vore utan henne menskolifvet?

This high regard for woman was an element which Tegnér prized as one of the redeeming features of the Swedish character, a sense of chivalry (*ridderlighet*) which from time immemorial has marked the Germanic race. His distorted view in *Mjeltsjukan* may easily be forgiven him, when we realize the agony of the hour thru which he passed.

The whole picture which *Mjeltsjukan* presents is the melancholy expression of a sensitive spirit who for the time was overwhelmed with a sense of disaster. Yet thru it all one can clearly see the sustaining light of his religion, which was not darkened even by the most painful misfortunes. This lack of equipoise in the poet, so painfully manifest in *Mjeltsjukan*, finally led to that lamentable condition in which his grand genius suffered a total collapse. But the distorted view which in those moments of dejection he pronounced upon life and man, was only a temporary aberration. His naturally benign and kindly nature finally asserted itself over the disappointments of life. His advanced age witnessed a mellowed spirit that pronounced a gentle and magnanimous judgment upon mankind, whom he had so mercilessly flayed in *Mjeltsjukan*. This was the true Tegnér, the Christian poet, whom moments of mental anguish had actually deranged. Three years before his death he declared (*Efter talets slut vid Vexjö gymnasii jubelfest*)¹⁴ that the judgment of God is tempered with mercy, for man is judged not by what he actually is or does but by the desire which he cherishes to do right and to live

¹⁴ Den, som föds, skall dö,
och lycklig den, som lemnar kvar ett minne,
om icke af det, som han gjort,
dock af det ädla, som han sökt och velat!

I höghvåld domsal, uti himmelsblå,
som hänger öfver stjernorna der oppe,
der frågas icke, hvad du gjort och utfört,
ej om du målet nått, men om du sökt det
med redligt mod, med oförtröttad håg;
ty vår är viljan, allt det andra lyckans.

up to his ideals. This is in keeping with Tegnér's belief in the divinity of man and in the universal love of God. Character, not theological dogmas, ideals, not a theological faith, are the criterion of man's worth and the means of his salvation; human weakness must be taken into account by the Just God. The unjust severity of *Mjeltsjukan*, on the other hand, was in direct contrast to this broad spirit of magnanimity, the former an expression of a temporary personal emotion, the latter an unfolding of the spirit which had found its true equipoise. Such a personality which could adjust itself to life (even as Ingeborg adjusted herself to the tragedy that befell her) and which retained its sweetness as well as its strength to the end, was the ideal Swedish character, "et helt menneske" as Brandes called him. The elegy was the strain in tune with his soul, and that seriousness which Tegnér himself recognized in the national character marked both his own individual character and his own poetry. One cannot read his poetry without entertaining the highest regard for and the most intense sympathy with a spirit so lofty, noble and courageous as was Tegnér, nor can we but admire the sustaining character of a religion which carried him thru the storm that eventually wrecked his mind.

ALBERT MOREY STURTEVANT.

Kansas University.